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# Oxford Inklings Walking Tour

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This tour was written by Kim Gilnett, with assistance from Stan Mattson and Michael Ward, “C.S. Lewis Walking Tour of Oxford Centre,” <https://www.cslewis.org/resource/walkguide/>. Some additional information is culled from the walking tours in the appendices of Harry Lee Poe, *The Inklings of Oxford* (Zondervan, 2009). Links are color-coded:

- [Oxford history](#) (purple links)
- [Apple maps](#) (blue links)
- [Wikipedia](#) (black links)

Arrange tour of The Kilns and visit to Headington in the morning, by car, followed by the walking tour of Oxford. Plan to arrive at Magdalen College during visiting hours, 2:00pm to 6:15pm daily.

Daytime parking in central Oxford is limited and expensive. There are five [Park & Ride services](#), one located at each of the main roads into the City. All Park and Ride sites are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Parking (£4). Bus fare for two, same-day round trip (about £5-7).

[Seacourt](#): Located off the A420 from Swindon and Bath, to the west of the city on the Botley Road. Approx 794 spaces. [Apple map](#).

[Thornhill](#): Located off the A40 from Thame, Aylesbury, High Wycombe, London and the M40 to the east of the city, just before the ring road. 1,335 spaces. [Apple map](#).

The main car park and coach park for the City is on [Oxpens Road](#) — check the [Oxford City Council website](#) for details of all city-centre parking. The [Oxfordshire County Council website](#) has more info about on-street parking in Oxford.

[Bus timetable](#).

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## Broad Street east to Holywell Street

Begin this walk on Broad Street east of Balliol College, in front of the world-famous **Blackwell's Bookshop** ([map](#), [oxhx](#)), directly across the street from the Sheldonian Theatre. Could spend a full day just inside Blackwell's!

The [Sheldonian Theatre](#) ([map](#), [oxhx](#)) is Oxford's illustrious meeting hall designed by Christopher Wren. Here Lewis delivered his winning English essay as an undergraduate and Tolkien received his honorary doctorate (Poe, p. 24). Visitors enter the door in the center of the building closest to Broad Street. Climb the wooden stairs to the cupola for a splendid view of the Radcliffe Camera and St. Mary's tower.

Nearby is the **Oxford History of Science Museum** ([map](#), [oxhx](#), [website](#)). Open Tuesday-Sunday, 12-5pm, donations. Buy a history of the museum book (£10). Mask required. No public restrooms. Could spend several days here!

On Turl Street, view Exeter College ([map](#), [oxhx](#)), where J. R. R. Tolkien, Neville Coghill, and Hugo Dyson were undergraduates. A bust of Tolkien is in the Chapel.

When facing Blackwell's you will notice a tiny pub on your left. **The White Horse** ([map](#), [oxhx](#)), which seems almost part of the shop. A short distance to your right, beyond the traffic lights and on the corner, you'll see **The King's Arms** pub ([map](#)).

Humphrey Carpenter, in *The Inklings*, reports that Lewis and his friends used to meet in these two pubs during the war (and at the Mitre on the High Street) because of a beer shortage "caused largely by thirsty American troops waiting for D-Day." The shortage meant that the Inklings could not always rely on their favourite haunt, The Eagle and Child, to provide refreshment.

From the diary of Major Warren Lewis (C.S. Lewis's brother), we read of the death of Charles Williams on Tuesday, May 15, 1945:

"I felt dazed and restless [at the news of Williams' death], and went out to get a drink: choosing unfortunately the King's Arms, where during the winter Charles and I more than once drank a pint after leaving Tollers [J.R.R. Tolkien] at the Mitre, with much glee at "clearing one's throat of varnish with good honest beer" as Charles used to say. There will be no more pints with Charles: no more "Bird and the Baby": the blackout has fallen, and the Inklings can never be the same."

Continue on past The King's Arms along **Holywell Street** ([oxhx](#)), one of the most wonderful streets in Oxford.

Notice a little side street called **Bath Place**. If you wish to take a short detour, stroll down this lane to the renowned and ancient pub, The Turf Tavern ([map](#)). It is one of the few places where you can order the old English drink, Mead.

Notice the Holywell Music Room ([map](#), [oxhx](#)) across the street, where the Inklings often attended concerts. Built in the 1740's, it is the oldest surviving building in Europe designed exclusively for concerts.

12 Holywell Street ([map](#)): Hugo Dyson lived here.

99 Holywell Street ([map](#)): Tolkien lived here.

Continue walking down Holywell Street until you come to the corner of **Mansfield Road**. Turn into Mansfield and stop by the first house on your right. In this narrow, crooked house, Lewis spent his first night in Oxford in December 1916.

From *Surprised By Joy*, by C.S. Lewis:

"My first taste of Oxford was comical enough. I had made no arrangements about quarters and, having no more luggage than I could carry in my hand, I sallied out of the railway station on foot to find either a lodging-house or a cheap hotel; all agog for "dreaming spires" and "last enchantments." My first disappointment at what I saw could be dealt with. Towns always show their worst face to the railway. But as I walked on and on I became more bewildered. Could this succession of mean shops really be Oxford? But I still went on, always expecting the next turn to reveal the beauties, and reflecting that it was a much larger town than I had been led to suppose.

Only when it became obvious that there was very little town left ahead of me, that I was in fact getting to open country, did I turn round and look. There behind me, far away, never more beautiful since, was the fabled cluster of spires and towers. I had come out of the station on the wrong side and been all this time walking into what was even then the mean and sprawling suburb of Botley. I did not see to what extent this little adventure was an allegory of my whole life. I merely walked back to the station, somewhat footsore, took a hansom, and asked to be driven to “some place where I can get rooms for a week, please.”

The method, which I should now think hazardous, was a complete success, and I was soon at tea in comfortable surroundings. The house is still there, the first on the right as you turn into Mansfield Road out of Holywell. I shared the sitting room with another candidate, a man from Cardiff College, which he pronounced to be architecturally superior to anything in Oxford. His learning terrified me, but he was an agreeable man. I have never seen him since.”

Walk a short distance along Mansfield Road and then turn right into **Jowett Walk**. (Benjamin Jowett was a famous 19th Century Oxford figure and Master of Balliol College). Proceed to the end of Jowett Walk, stop and look ahead and to your left. There you will see one of Oxford’s forgotten treasures, St. Cross Parish Church ([map](#)).

Built on an ancient foundation as the parish church of the Holywell Manor, the chancel arch of the Church of St. Cross dates from the mid-12th Century. It is the setting of the wedding between Harriet Vane and Lord Peter Wimsey in **Dorothy L. Sayers’** mystery, *Busman’s Honeymoon*.

NOTE: St. Cross is a Special Collections Centre of Balliol College and is not open to the general public without prior appointment. See their website for information and visit here for their enquiry form.

Make sure you take time to visit the adjoining **St. Cross Cemetery**. As you enter, notice a small posted map that will lead you to the graves of **Hugo Dyson**, **Austin Farrer** and **Charles Williams**, all members of Lewis’s circle of friends. The path leads through a tangle of brambles and nettles now maintained as a wildlife refuge. Also you can find the resting place of Kenneth Grahame, author of the classic children’s book, *The Wind in the Willows*.

Upon leaving the churchyard, turn right and proceed onto Manor Road. In the next block stands a row of houses. The Tolkiens moved to 3 Manor Road ([map](#)) at the end of World War II. Retrace your steps to the cemetery.

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### Longwall Street south to High Street / Magdalen College

Upon leaving the cemetery, go back towards Jowett Walk and continue past it (the pavement becomes very narrow). You are now in **Longwall Street**.

On your left, you will find a substantial section of the old city wall. Behind that wall is the Magdalen College Grove with its unique deer park. You will see it better when you enter Magdalen College.

Continue to the very end of Longwall Street where it meets the busy **High Street** ([oxhx](#)). Turn left and walk past the entrance of Magdalen College ([map](#)) on to the center of Magdalen Bridge, which spans the River Cherwell.

As you turn to face Magdalen College, you will find one of the most beautiful sights in all of Oxford, the glorious **Magdalen Tower** ([map](#)). Built between 1490 and 1510, it is more than 150 feet high.

Looking down from the bridge, over the parapet, you will very likely see a number of punts on the **Cherwell River**. This is a great place to rent a punt for an afternoon on the slow-moving river.

Retrace your steps to the entrance of Magdalen College ([map](#), [oxhx](#)). Lewis spent almost 30 years here.

There is a fee for visiting. It is highly recommended that you pay a little more for the **guided tour**. These tours are generally given by current students who can often take you into areas to which you would otherwise not be allowed. We also recommend that you purchase one of the **guidebooks**. It will give valuable information on Magdalen College. Allow at least 45 minutes to visit the college.

During your visit to Magdalen, don't miss:

The New Building: Dating from 1735 (hence "New!"), this imposing building provided C.S. Lewis with a beautifully situated suite of rooms. They were on the second floor (first floor by English reckoning), near the middle. The two windows directly to the right of the protruding center section, above the wisteria, were Lewis'. It was here that Lewis was converted to a belief in God (theism). From *Surprised by Joy*, by C.S. Lewis:

"You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England."

Addison's Walk ([map](#)): Named after the great English man of letters and graduate of Magdalen, Joseph Addison, this was a favourite walking place for Lewis and his friends. From *They Stand Together: The Letters of C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves*:

*September 1931*. He [Hugo Dyson] stayed the night with me in College... Tolkien came too, and did not leave till 3 in the morning... We began (in Addison's Walk just after dinner) on metaphor and myth – interrupted by a rush of wind which came so suddenly on the still warm evening and sent so many leaves pattering down that we thought it was raining.... We continued on Christianity: a good



long satisfying talk in which I learned a lot....

*October 1931.* Now what Dyson and Tolkien showed me was this: that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story I didn't mind it at all: and again, that if I met the idea of god sacrificing himself to himself.... I liked it very much... provided I met it anywhere except in the Gospels... Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with tremendous difference that it really happened.... Does this amount to a belief in Christianity? At any rate I am now certain (a) that this Christian story is to be approached, in a sense, as I approach the other myths; (b) that it is the most important and full of meaning. I am also nearly sure that it happened....

**Deer Park:** The deer in this special reserve are kept as part of the Magdalen College grounds. Once a year one of these magnificent beasts has the great honor of becoming the feast for Magdalen College and its guests.

From *C.S. Lewis's Letters*:

"My big sitting room looks north and from it I can see nothing, not even a gable or a spire, to remind me that I am in town. I look down on a stretch of ground which passes into a grove of immemorial forest trees, at present coloured autumn red. Over it stray deer. They are erratic in their habits. Some mornings when I look out there will be half a dozen chewing the cud just underneath me, and on others there will be none in sight — or a little stag (not much bigger than a calf and looking too slender for the weight of his antlers) standing and sending through the fog that queer little bark which is these beasts' "moo." It is a sound that will be as familiar to me as the cough of the cows in the field at home for I hear it day and night."

**The Hall** (included on guided tour only): Notice the fine woodwork of the screen. It dates from the end of the reign of Elizabeth I or the beginning of James I.

**The Chapel:** After Lewis' conversion to Christianity in 1931, he used to attend weekday services in the College chapel.

After completing your tour of Magdalen College, step out of the Porter's Lodge and cross the road. In front of you is the Botanic Garden ([map](#), [oxhx](#)), open to the public. This is the oldest garden of its kind in England and contains many rare and interesting specimens. It is built on an ancient Jewish burial-ground as is Magdalen College.

As you face the Botanic Garden, turn right and walk back towards the center of Oxford along the High Street (known to many simply as "the High").

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### High Street / Merton Street west from Magdalen College

Continue west along the High until you reach the Eastgate Hotel ([map](#), [oxhx](#)), which is on the corner of Merton Street. Since Tolkien was a Fellow of Merton College ([map](#)) and Lewis of Magdalen College, the Eastgate was a convenient place for them to meet.

Lewis and Tolkien met at the Eastgate on Monday mornings for more than 20 years, until Lewis moved to Cambridge.

C.S. Lewis in a letter to his brother, November 1939:

"On Thursday we had a meeting of the Inklings — you and Coghill both absent unfortunately. We dined at the Eastgate. I have never in my life seen Dyson so exuberant — "A roaring cataract of nonsense."

Walk south and west down Merton Street. On your right, bordering High Street and Merton Street, are the **Examination Schools** ([map](#)). Here and in other venues, Lewis, Tolkien and Williams presented their lectures to Oxford students.

C.S. Lewis in a letter of February 1940:

"On Monday Charles Williams lectured, nominally on [Milton's] Comus but really on Chastity. Simply as criticism it was superb — because here was a man who really cared with every fibre of his being about "The sage and the serious doctrine of virginity" which it would never occur to the ordinary modern reader to take seriously."

One relief above a doorway shows an undergraduate being examined by three University fellows. Another relief above a doorway shows a candidate receiving a degree (hope!). Poe, p. 53.

Walk west down Merton Street to Merton College ([map](#), just past Logic Lane). J. R. R. Tolkien moved from Pembroke College to Merton College in 1945 with Hugo Dyson. Visitors may enter by the main gate.

Return to High Street, via Logic Lane, and you will pass by University College ([map](#)) and the Radcliffe Quad ([map](#)).

The young C.S. Lewis arrived at University College on April 26, 1917 to begin his academic studies as an undergraduate.

His rooms were on staircase XII, Room 5 of the Radcliffe Quad. When the young Lewis interrupted his studies to join the army, he had the good fortune to stay in Oxford and train at Keble College. He often would return to University College (known as "Univ.") for weekends.

C.S. Lewis in a letter of July, 1917:

"You can't imagine how I have come to love Univ., especially since I left. Last Saturday evening when I was sleeping alone, I spent a long time wandering over it, into all sorts of parts where I had never been before, where the mullioned windows are dark with ivy that no one has bothered to cut since the war emptied the rooms they belong to."

Lewis was to take a double first in Literae Humaniores (more commonly known as "Classics"); he completed his studies with a first in English in 1923.

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## Loop: Queen's Lane / New College Lane / Catte Street

Leaving University College through the Porter's Lodge, cross over the High Street, walk back towards Magdalen for a short way, past Logic Lane, and you will come to **Queen's Lane**. Turn left to go north on Queen's Lane and, as you pass St. Edmund Hall ([map](#); "Teddy Hall") on your right, notice the church of St. Peter's-in-the-East ([map](#)). Now converted into the Teddy Hall Library, this church was attended often by Lewis (on Wednesday mornings) for Holy Communion.

Continue along Queen's Lane, noticing how quiet it becomes. On your right is New College ([map](#)). Christopher Tolkien was a fellow at New College.

On your left is The Queen's College ([map](#)) and then All Soul's College ([map](#)). You will pass under a bridge which is where Queen's Lane becomes **New College Lane**.

Continue along New College Lane until you pass under another bridge which connects two buildings belonging to Hertford College. This bridge is sometimes called the "Bridge of Sighs" ([map](#)).

Stop here and look along south to your left, along **Catte Street**, and you will see what is perhaps the most impressive architectural view in all England: the square tower of the Bodleian Library, the round dome of the Radcliffe Camera ([map](#)) and, beyond that, the soaring spire of the **University Church** ([map](#)). Begin to walk south on Catte Street past these buildings.

To your right is the famous **Bodleian Library** ([map](#); the main library of Oxford University) where Lewis spent many hours reading and studying. The Radcliffe Camera is a reading room of the Bodleian and contains mostly books on theology and English. Lewis considered the Divinity School ([map](#)), within the Bodleian, the most beautiful room in all of Oxford.

The University Church of St. Mary the Virgin ([map](#), [oxhx](#); you'll find the best view of Oxford from its tower!) is where Lewis delivered his famous war-time sermons, "The Weight of Glory" and "Learning in War-Time."

Walk past University Church and back onto the High Street.

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## High Street west to Carfax Tower and Pembroke College

Turn right to go west on High Street. You will pass Brasenose College ([map](#)) on your right and, as you advance along the High Street, you will reach the **Mitre Hotel** ([map](#), [oxhx](#); also on your right). This was another favorite eating spot for C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and friends.

Continue on High Street until you reach a cross-roads. Pause for a moment. In front of you is Carfax Tower ([map](#)), so-called from the French “carrefour,” meaning crossroads. In contrast with the quiet Queen’s Lane, this area is one of the busiest places in Oxford.

Turn left to go south for a detour to two landmarks, before retracing your steps to the cross-roads:

Pembroke College ([map](#)). J. R. R. Tolkien spent twenty years as fellow and Professor of Anglo-Saxon here.

1 Brewer Street ([map](#)). House in which Dorothy L. Sayers was born.

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### Cornmarket Street north to Mary Mag's and St. Giles St.

Once back at Carfax Tower ([map](#)), go north on Cornmarket Street ([oxhx](#)) and walk past all the shops past Market Street, and past Ship Street, until you come to Broad Street ([oxhx](#)). Ahead of you and on your right you will see St. Mary Magdalen’s Church ([map](#), [oxhx](#)). Lewis used to frequent this church for confession.

Walk alongside the church (known as “Mary Mag”) and you will come upon the Martyrs’ Memorial ([map](#)), built in remembrance of the 16th century martyrs, Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley, who were burned at the stake nearby. Cross the street (carefully). On your left you will see the Randolph Hotel ([map](#)), a wonderful place for high tea (reservations recommended).

Continue to your right past the famed Ashmolean museum ([map](#); could spend a full day here!), going north along the wide, tree-lined road called St. Giles ([oxhx](#); so named after **St. Giles’s Church** at the far end; [map](#), [oxhx](#)).

When you reach Pusey St, go left a block.

The Tolkiens lived at 1 Alfred St. (now Pusey St., [map](#)) when they first came to Oxford after World War 1.

“Tolkien had already begun to write his great mythology... He read his tale ‘The Fall of Gondolin’ to the Essay Club of Exeter College, an undergraduate society that included Nevill Coghill and Hugo Dyson...” (Poe, pp. 53-54).

Return to St. Giles St, and continue north.

On your left you will come to the most famous Lewis pub, The Eagle and Child (also known as “The Bird and Baby”; [map](#), [oxhx](#)). It was here that the Inklings met informally every Tuesday morning to drink and to discuss the books they were reading (and writing). After Lewis moved to Cambridge, they continued, switching the day to Mondays.

In 1962, after a remodeling of the Bird and Baby (one of many), they moved across the street to The Lamb and Flag ([oxhx](#)).

From Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet*:

"[Ransom, after arriving back on earth,] contrived to get into a lane, then a road, then into a village street. A lighted door was open. There were voices from within and they were speaking English. There was a familiar smell. He pushed his way in, regardless of the surprise he was creating in the bar. "A pint of bitter, please," said Ransom."

Return south to Mary Mag's, then walk east to your starting point on Broad Street, near Blackwell's and the Sheldonian Theatre.

Balliol College; [map](#), [oxhx](#), east of Mary Mag's, you will pass it on your left on Broad Street as you return to Blackwell's. Lord Peter Wimsey attended Balliol College.

Spend any extra time (if we have any!) in Blackwell's or in the History of Science Museum.

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## Greater Oxford – driving

Oxford is a city that sets its own course, regardless of how the rest of the world goes. The River Thames flows below Oxford and above Oxford, but through the city flows the River Isis. The big bell in Tom Tower of Christ Church tolls at five minutes past the hour according to Greenwich Mean Time because reason insists that Oxford is five minutes later than Greenwich. Even though Magdalen College pronounces its name *Maudlin*, St. Mary Magdalen Church pronounces its name the same way it would be pronounced anywhere else in the English-speaking world, except Cambridge of course, which also adds a final "e."  
(Poe, p. 19)

Northmoor Road: The Tolkiens lived at 20 Northmoor Road from 1930 to 1947, where Tolkien wrote most of *The Lord of the Rings* (Poe, pp. 66-68; [map](#)).

One of Jack's favorite walks was a late afternoon visit to **The Perch** for a pint and conversation ([map](#); a quaint, thatch-roofed pub on Binsey Lane across the Port Meadow; [map](#)).

Afterward perhaps a stroll along the **Isis River** to **The Trout** ([map](#); the most glorious of pubs) for dinner.



## Headington — morning/driving

Headington Quarry ([map](#)). Driving recommended. (Park at The Kilns)

If walking, catch the Headington/Risinghurst bus on Queen's Street beside the Carfax Tower. Ask the bus driver for a round-trip ticket to the Lewis Close stop ([map](#)) on Kilns Lane. When riding up Headington Hill on a bus, Lewis concluded there must be a God (Poe, p. 45).

This map shows Kilns Lane, Lewis Close, and the Kilns home ([map](#)):



The Kilns ([map](#)).

The Kilns is the first house on the right side of Lewis Close. C. S. and Warnie Lewis lived at the Kilns from 1931 until their deaths. During Lewis' lifetime, the entire street was part of the Kilns property. Warnie sold off lots for development for income. The Kilns is used by the C. S. Lewis Foundation ([cslewis.org](http://cslewis.org)) as a study center for visiting scholars.



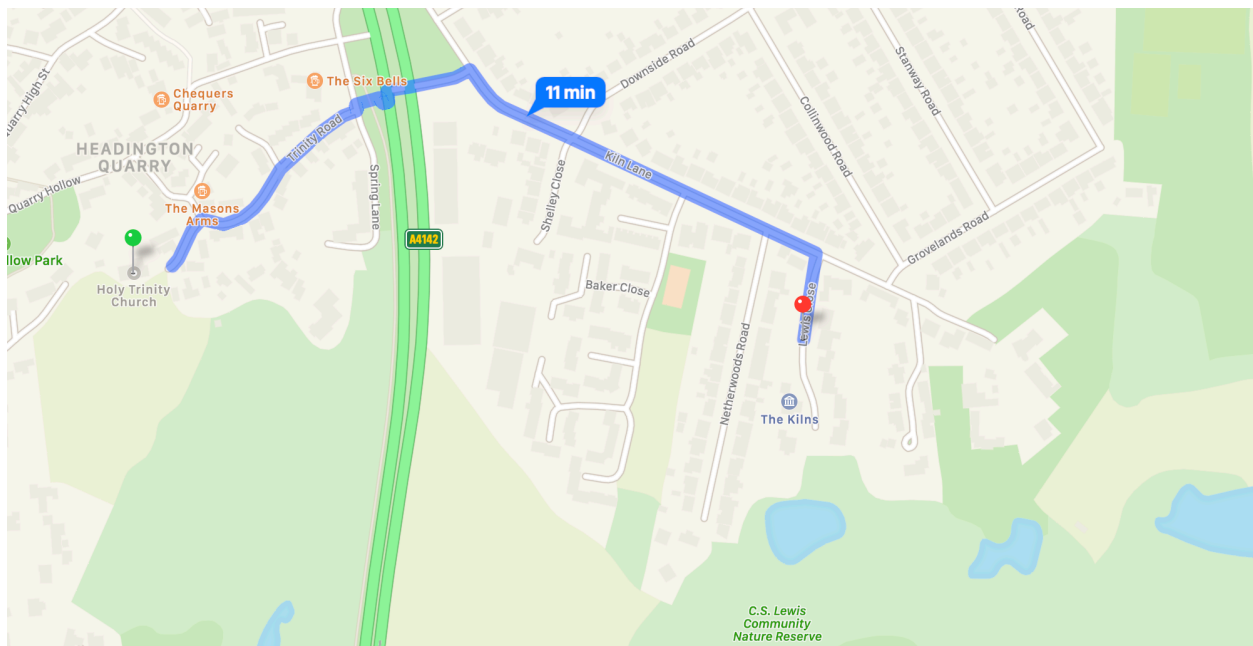
Book a [tour](#) of the Kilns at least two weeks in advance. It is not a museum, but a place of residence for scholars-in-residence. The Kilns also hosts summer seminars. Temporary parking is available at The Kilns while on a booked tour. £15 per adult, cash only.

After visiting the Kilns, enter the nature preserve that begins at the edge of the Close with a path to the pond where Lewis used to swim. He cut the paths through this wild area and planted many of the trees. At the left end of the pond is the bomb shelter Lewis had built at the beginning of World War II. At the right end of the pond stands the semicircular bench Lewis built for enjoying the view of the pond. Climb the path to the right of the bench to the top of Shotover Hill and a view of the surrounding countryside.

Lewis' parish church and grave site at [Holy Trinity Church](#) ([map](#)).

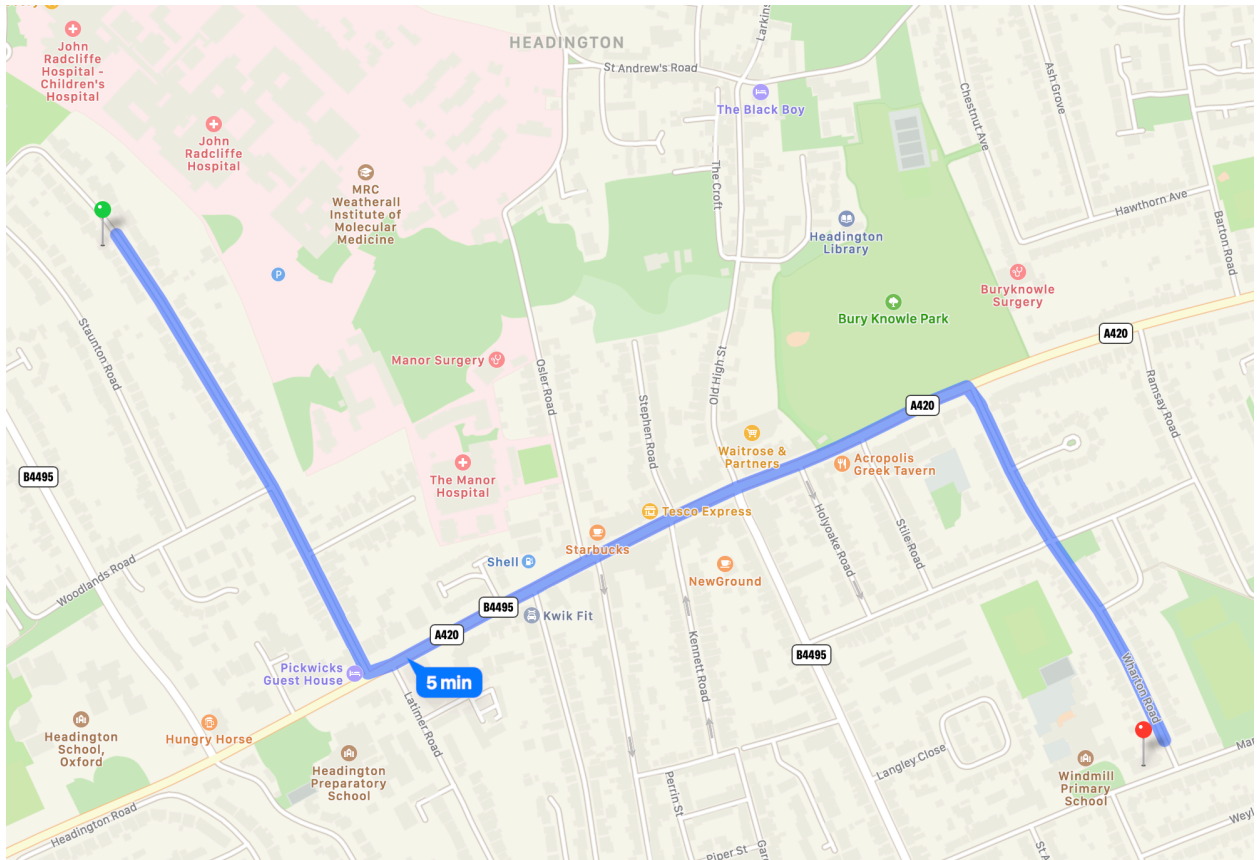
When you finish your walk on the hill, return down Lewis Close to Kilns Lane and turn left. Proceed down Kilns Lane all the way to the Eastern By-Pass. Do not follow the curve of the road to the right. Cross the Eastern By-Pass at the crossing lights where you will reach Trinity Road, which winds its way a short distance to **Holy Trinity Church** ([map](#)), where Jack and Warnie Lewis attended services every Sunday.

Both brothers lie buried together under a single gravestone. Walk straight into the churchyard past the church to the back wall, where a sign points to the left directing you to the Lewis grave.



After visiting the grave, enter the church. Along the far outside aisle you will find the short pew where the Lewis brothers habitually sat. It is on the left side of the church facing the altar, about half-way back, next to a stone column opposite the board that posts the Psalms. It is marked by a small brass plaque.

## Tolkien church and home



### Church of Corpus Christi, 88 Wharton Road ([map](#))

When finished, return to Trinity Road and turn left. After only a few feet, turn left onto Quarry School Road. At the end of this short street, turn left onto Quarry Hollow and climb the hill where the name changes to Margaret Road. Continue along Margaret Road to the intersection of Wharton Road where the Catholic Church of Corpus Christi stands on the corner. The Tolkiens attended this church when they lived in Headington.

### Tolkien home, 76 Sandfield Road ([map](#))

J. R. R. Tolkien and Edith lived in this two-story white stucco house from 1953 until 1968. A stone marker is on the side of the house.